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ABSTRACT

The success of foreign language in elementary schools (FLES) depends upon the cooperation and effort of administrators, classroom teachers, secondary school language teachers, the community at large, and parents. Having stated this, the author points out five fundamentals for FLES concerning: (1) major objectives, (2) sequential planning, (3) program articulation, (4) basic lesson presentation, and (5) program coordination. Implications of these five principles are spelled out. Final discussion of Title V (known as the Bilingual Education Act) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act emphasizes improvement of classroom activities in Pennsylvania. (RL)

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Foreign Language
In Elementary Schools

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This article, written by DAVID T. CHESTNUT, Coordinator Division of Languages is part of a series included in the Primary Packet of Materials. The packet is compiled by the Division of Early Childhood Education, Mrs. Charlotte G. Garman, Coordinator.

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Foreign Language in Elementary Schools

FLES: the initials of Foreign Language (in) Elementary Schools, so abbreviated by Kenneth Mildenberger in 1953 when he was planning the first MLA questionnaire on foreign language enrollments at this level. The term has gained wide usage and is usually now pronounced as a word to rhyme with "dress." (What's What by Donald D. Welsh, MLA).

FLES is based upon the need of our country to break from our monolingual shell for the good of the individual and for the welfare of the nation. Two world wars, commitments in Asia, Europe, Africa, and South America have served to awaken the public to the fact that once distant peoples are now our close neighbors. With the new awareness has come the realization of the importance of foreign languages in building a foundation of international understanding. Monolingualism has led us to give the impression that we consider foreigners as "underdeveloped Americans." When Americans are sent abroad they should be ready to work in a foreign culture: they must speak and read the language of the assigned country and be thoroughly trained in the culture of the country. The cultural area comprises not only the intellectual, formal Kultur, but culture in the anthropological sense, including non-verbal language. All of this takes time and costs money. Time is available through scheduling a long sequence of second language learning. The cost can be reduced by introducing the study as a part of general education, on a par with the recognized subject areas in the elementary-secondary curriculum.

Attention to the development of personality, self-value, and individual understanding of the world occupies an increasing amount of time in the curriculum. In this connection the words of Wesley Childers in Foreign Language Teaching, a publication of the Center for Applied Research in Teaching, merit consideration:

> "A foreign language gives the young child a better preparation for understanding the big world he lives in; it gives a third dimension, 'my world,' to those of 'my family' and 'my country.' By immersing himself in the language and customs of a foreign people, a child begins unconsciously to identify himself with humanity in general." Language is an expression of culture; by active participation in the language, a child or an adult experiences the culture in a manner which can lead, as no other, to direct understanding. The importance of this aspect of education for the entire population of the future must not be underestimated.

FLES requires, for success, the agreement on five fundamentals by the following groups of people: administrators (superintendent, supervising principal, elementary school principal, elementary supervisor); classroom teachers (including members of the faculty who are not immediately involved in the program); secondary school teachers of language; parents; members of the community at large (Service Club members); and pupils.

THE FIVE FUNDAMENTALS OF FLES

I. The FLES program aims to teach a foreign language. Development of skill in the areas of understanding and speaking a second language is the major objective. Within limits of vocabulary and experience, the elementary school sequence proposes for the pupils (1) mastery of the sound system as used by native speakers and reproducing the sounds as spoken activity, and (2) mastery, to the point of automatic habit, of the basic structures of the language.

Secondary to the skills of language, and expected outcomes of the instruction, are: favorable attitudes toward continued language study, and toward persons of another language and another culture.

II. The FLES program is part of a sequence that continues, without a break, from the grade in the elementary school in which it is begun to the end of the secondary school. It is possible that in the latter years of the elementary segment the skills of reading and writing may be added, with more extensive vocabulary, cultural context enlargement, and the addition of some secondary or alternate patterns.

III. The materials of instruction are organized to develop the skills of understanding and speaking, and in later segments, reading and writing. The core lesson requires follow-up practice scheduled regularly and as much incidental practice as possible.

IV. Presentation of the basic lessons may be made by (1) a live special language teacher who travels from room to room, (2) a filmed, or televised teacher, (3) the classroom teacher in the elementary room. Follow-up practice may be conducted by the classroom teacher and is essential to the program.

V. Integration of the FLES program with the secondary offering permits continuity of learning, avoiding a "starting all over again." The materials of instruction at the secondary level complement the FLES materials.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FIVE FUNDAMENTALS

I. Enthusiasm and a positive attitude in the teachers and administrators are required to achieve success in FLES.

II. Language training is an established part of the elementary school curriculum, offered to all pupils. Scheduling of the lesson time during the week is as vital for follow-up practice as for the basic lesson. In the case of the televised program, provision must be made for alternate scheduling of the telecast. The number of pupils who observe one receiver must be limited to one class to permit proper visual contact with the TV teacher.

III. Classroom teachers have a period of training and orientation to the program. Inservice courses televised after the school day and completed prior to the scheduling of the lesson materials for the pupils are provided.

IV. All secondary foreign language teachers are constantly aware of the progress of the program.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION ACT

Increased awareness of our world neighbors and our need to communicate with them through the medium of their languages has sharpened a similar awareness of the approximately 19 million inhabitants of the United States whose dominant language is not English. Our melting-pot tradition, our isolationism and ethnocentrism developed from the expanding economy of a nation moving from the east coast to the west coast have placed obstacles in the path of many adults and continue to put stumbling blocks in front of their children. The education of a child should be so planned as to make him literate in his mother tongue and, in the United States, to develop facility in English.

Title VII, ESEA, known as the Bilingual Education Act, has as its objectives instruction in two languages, one of which is English, so that a child may learn the concepts of the curriculum in his mother tongue, to develop that tongue to its fullest and to become fluent in English.

School districts which have a high concentration of such children, ages 3-18, whose families are within the economic limits as prescribed in Title I, ESEA, may apply directly to the United States Office of Education for grants to operate a variety of programs aimed at solving the problem. Classroom operation, teacher training, materials development,

and research are all possible under the guidelines for this act. Emphasis in Pennsylvania will be placed upon classroom activities, especially in the early childhood area, and upon teacher training.

SCHOOL CODE AMENDMENT

A recent (July 1968) amendment to Section 1511, School Laws of Pennsylvania, permits instruction in a language other than English as part of a bilingual education program or as part of a long sequence of second language instruction for speakers of English. The members of the Pennsylvania Legislature have shown their interest and understanding of the problem by their favorable action in passing the amendment.